

## [The Miller Family]

26052 [?]

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

Miami, Florida

3,500 Words

February 15, 1939

The Lapham Family (White)

1008 Jefferson Ave.

Miami Beach, Florida

Artist

Dorothy Wood, Writer

THE MILLER FAMILY

In a modern three room apartment on Miami Beach in a building located near the main street and the ocean, lives the Miller family. There are four floors to the building and the Millers live on the third one. The place is always quiet, with only the noise of automobiles passing by. Palm trees shade the narrow lawn in front of the building. The other buildings in the block are quite similar to the one I enter. Most of them have lawns equipped with lawn chairs and large, brightly colored sun umbrellas. The chairs are usually occupied

## Library of Congress

because the people who live in these houses have plenty of leisure hours to spend in such fashion. There is an atmosphere of contentment and restfulness everywhere.

As I open the screen door I enter a small lobby, furnished with easy chairs, tables, and reading lamps. Placed conveniently near the chairs are smoking stands for the use of the tenants, and the newest magazines are on the tables. I pass through the lobby and to the left find the stairs leading to the floors above. I climb two flights of well carpeted stairs, and knock on the door at my left.

2

Entering the front door, I come directly into the dining room, a very small, cozy one, almost a breakfast nook, equipped with a small table placed in the middle of the room, and four chairs. In the center of the table a potted plant or bowl of flowers is usually placed on a crocheted center cloth, made by the wife. The floor is stained a light color, and a figured linoleum extends into the kitchen, which is separated from the dining room only by an arched opening. All the walls are painted a light cream and have several fruit prints hanging on them.

The tiny kitchen has a built-in sinks, drainboard and cup-board extending almost the entire length of one side. On the opposite side is a porcelain, four-burner gas stove with oven, and an electric refrigerator. There is one window in the room, at the far end, which is hung with a green checked cotton curtain.

At the right of the front door is the entrance to a spacious living room and bed room combined. The room is bright and airy, always cool. To the left of the door is a green covered studio couch. Two easy chairs, one upholstered in green, the other in brown, make one desire to sit down and rest immediately. Near one of the chairs is a floor lamp, providing an ideal spot for reading. On a table next to the wall is a radio, and on either side large, life-like, tinted photographs of the two members of the Miller family. The bed is the in-a-door type, commonly called a Murphy bed. When it is made for the day, the room

## Library of Congress

is at once a 3 comfortable living room again. The two windows at the left have [ecru?] colored lace curtains, with draperies of the same color at either side. A rug with a green background covers the floor.

A door at the left, as I enter the dining room, leads into the bathroom, furnished in a color scheme of orchid and green. The floor is tiled and there is a tub and shower, with plenty of hot water. A green rag rug to spread in front of the lavatory, and a built-in medicine cabinet is above it. The entire house is always neat and {immaculately?} clean, giving one the impression that it has just been swept and dusted. It fits the people who live in it, they are so clean and neat, too.

Hazel Miller, the wife is a tall, stately person, with long, blonde, permanently waved hair, hanging loose on her shoulders, beautiful brown eyes and a clear, smooth complexion. She is a trifle above normal weight, but by means of active sports keeps her weight down as much as possible. She is always cheerful and ready to go anywhere that promises entertainment. Most of the time she wears slacks, or shorts, the typical day-time dress of this beach resort. When Hazel dresses to go out she is a stunning looking person. Her well tailored sports clothes that she usually wears, fit well. She always looks well groomed, although her clothes may not be new. Her nails are seldom painted, because she dislikes bright finger nail polish on them.

Bob Miller, the husband, is six feet tall, a blonde with blue 4 eyes, and he has a very low, pleasant voice, indicating culture. He is 32 years old and makes a comfortable living by his chosen profession, art. He and Hazel have been married a little more than five years, and are very happy together.

"How are you today?" I inquire, as Hazel invites me to enter.

"Fine," replies Hazel. "Bob isn't at home, he went to see a man about painting a picture in his hotel. This time of year is the busiest for him and he is gone most of the time." It is a

## Library of Congress

warm, sunshiny day and Hazel feels the urge to take a sun bath. "How would you like to go down to the beach for a while?"

She provides a bathing suit for me and after donning them, we walk the three blocks to the beach.

"Last night Bob and I went to the show," continues Hazel. "We very seldom go out but Bob didn't work last night so we decided to spend the evening by taking in a movie. We saw Spencer Tracy in Boy's [Team?] and it surely was good. Both of us like him very much. Bob likes to see the Dead End boys play, too, and never misses a picture they play in if he can help it. I like to go to the show, but, of course, you know I prefer something with more action and exercise than you can get at shows. They are too tame for me. I play baseball nearly every Wednesday night, badminton two nights a week, and basketball once a week. Every afternoon I go over to the park and play tennis a couple of hours. That keeps my weight down and I have to do something all the time so I won't get too fat. Bob says when he was young, fat girls chased him and he had a horror of them, and here he has married one.

"If we could only have our own home it would take more of my time to keep house. As it is, I have the apartment all cleaned in two or three hours, with too much time on my hands. I would like more than anything to have two children, a boy and a girl, but Bob doesn't want any. He says he can easily take care of the two of us, but if we had any children, he would be tied down too much. He wants to be able to pack his clothes and leave any time he takes the notion. Of course, you can't do that way with children, so he is set on not having any. If I could only persuade him to buy a home, then we could soon get it paid for and settle down for good. If I could once get the home, I think after awhile he would be willing for us to have two children. I don't believe in having them if you can't take care of them properly and give them the advantages of a good education and a happy childhood, but I feel that we could do that without any trouble.

## Library of Congress

"I am the only child in my family and I am 27 years old. When I was fourteen, my father died. He left us a home but no ready cash so my mother started giving dancing lessons to take care of us. After a while my mother met Mr. Atkins, and they got married. He is a contractor, and a very wealthy one, too. I got married not long after they did so don't know him very well. For two years 6 Bob and I lived in the northern part of the state, but three years ago Bob decided he would get more work to do if he came to Miami, so we moved here.

"Bob has two brothers and two sisters, and he is the oldest. He to quite proud of his [ancestry?], too, especially the artistic ones. His grandmother on his mother's side was a short-story writer. She wrote some of the most weird stories I have ever read. All of Bob's people are from the North. His father played around with machinery as a hobby, and has made some very valuable inventions, although they were never patented. He used to be an airplane test pilot, too. One day he was supposed to go up in a plane, but when it started to take off, he suddenly decided he wouldn't go up this time. He said he had a funny feeling he shouldn't. So another pilot took the plane up. It crashed and the pilot was killed instantly. Bob's father died right after we got married and we surely did miss him. Everbody was crazy about him.

"Bob's mother is a very fine music teacher. She plays nothing but classical music and for many years she added to the family income by teaching. She graduated from high school when she was [sixteen?] years old, went to college two years, and started teaching French in a high school in Massachusetts when she was eighteen. She has accompanied several of the outstanding radio stars of today.

7

"Bob is restless here and wants to go back North because he thinks he can make more money there and I think so, too, but we don't have the money ahead to leave here now. He makes about [\$2,500?] a year down here, but the work only lasts about six months of the year. We have to budget ourselves so this will last a whole year and that's hard

## Library of Congress

to do. It's so easy to spend it when you have it and I guess we are not as foresighted as we should be. I suppose that should be enough for us but we have just finished paying for our car, and I am glad it is our own now. Bob has to have a car in his business so we bought a good one while we were at it. Besides, a Chrysler has always been his favorite of all cars. Out of this \$2,500 we have to pay rent, which is a big problem here in the winter especially, light and gas bills, buy groceries and clothes. We feel that we must have a nice apartment at a good address but sometimes during the summer we are so broke, I'd like to have some of the rent money in other things."

At this point Hazel and I decided we had had enough sun so we gathered our belongings together and returned home.

"Where did Bob go to school?" I ask.

"He graduated from high school up North. His father and mother liked to travel and they came to Florida nearly every winter. Of course, all the children had to be taken out of school there and started in down here. Bob says he really got his education from practical experience. His great ambition and desire has always been to be a second Rembrandt or Rockwell, so he has studied art all of his life. He says that every night for years he sat up until three or four o'clock in the morning reading books on art and making sketches. Bob never attended any art school or took any lessons. All he knows he has learned by himself for his parents never really helped him but he set his head and nothing could stop him. A friend of his, an old man who is also an artist, was very much interested in him and encouraged him to keep at it.

"I graduated from high school myself but didn't go to college. When I was twenty years old, I got married instead. I have traveled quite a bit and have been all over the North. We lived up North some when my father was living, but I met Bob in Florida. He is a born artist and some day I believe he will really be famous. He is proud of his work and I am, too. Unlike most other artists, if his work is slack and he can get something to do in another line, he

## Library of Congress

won't take it. He will wait until something in his line comes up, regardless of how badly we need the money.

"Lots of times when Bob is at work I sit home and read or sew. I have a library card and get books from the library here at the beach. Then I read magazines, too. I always buy the Life magazine because Bob uses pictures out of it in his work. And I keep up with all the gossip about the movie stars, too. Bob is too serious minded and ambitious to spend much time reading books of that sort. He always reads books on art or mythology, or some such subject.

9

Sometimes he reads detective magazines, but usually he spends his time reading books that will teach him something and do him some good.

"Bob doesn't like to go out much when he is working but spends his leisure hours at home reading a book or sketching. We go more in the summer time when he doesn't have much work to do. Sometimes he plays tennis, his favorite out-door sport, and he likes to go swimming, if the water is rough. When we go out at night, sometimes we go bowling, play miniature golf or some other game. One of Bob's favorite sports is sailing and he wants a sailboat about as much as anything else. He used to own one and he says some day he is going to get another one. I suppose we should save some of the money we spend on good times, but we both like to go out so much that it is hard to do.

"Bob is interested in sculpturing, too. He makes a hobby out of this, although he has designed one or two statues and made models of them, which he has sold. In fact, his whole life is centered around art of one form or another. He sees art in everything, but he doesn't paint portraits much. One or two people have asked him to paint theirs but somehow that isn't in his line. He just finished an oil painting for a friend in New York. This friend is a tailor and in return for the picture he sent Bob a tailor-made gray suit and for Christmas he sent me a tan one.

## Library of Congress

"I like to crochet. For Christmas presents, I made five crocheted 10 pocketbooks for my family and friends. Sometimes my eyes bother me and I have to stop. I really need new glasses; mine are broken, but I don't have the money to get them right now. And I hate to put them on, too. They are such a bother and so unbecoming to me. I have just finished making an afghan that I think is very pretty. These chair-back sets on the chairs I crocheted too. Several of the pieces you see on the tables I made. Sometimes I embroider but I don't really care for that much.

"Even though we don't have any children, we had a cat we called our child. His name was Tabby. He was just a plain cat but unusually large. Bob and I got him right after we were married and both of us had become very attached to him. We called him Mutt most of the time. I bought special food for him and never fed him anything I wouldn't eat myself. There was one spacial chair he liked to sleep in, so I made a cover for it and he spent lots of his time in it. On Christmas I always gave him a present, the same an I would a person. But a couple of weeks ago he got sick and we took him to the doctor. He finally told us there was nothing he could do for the Mutt. I don't know what was wrong with him, but the doctor said the only thing to do was put him to sleep. So now our Mutt is gone and we have made a resolution not to have any more pets, we become too much attached to them. Bob petted Mutt so much and he misses him as much as I do. Guess it's the thwarted parental instinct in both of us. Everywhere we turn we see things to remind us of him, and then me realize 11 that he is gone for good." The tears start streaming down Hazel's cheeks and I realize how much they did love the cat, as much as if it were a human being.

In order to get Hazel's mind off of her sorrow, I ask, "Do you like to cook? What kind of foods do you eat?"

"Because of the climate down hers, we eat lots of cold salads and meats, too. I studied all about diet when I went to school and can cook good meals when I want to but I had rather play tennis, or basketball than mess around in the kitchen. Bob likes potatoes and has to have them for dinner all the time, and I suppose his next favorite dish is soup — any kind.



## Library of Congress

He just loves it. We like sea foods a lot, too, especially shrimp. Sometimes I get ambitious and bake cakes, just when I take the notion I want to cook. We eat lots of fruits and make orange juice quite often. They are good for you. Lots of times I have to wait and wait for Bob to come home from work so we can't have regular hours to eat."

"Do you go to church regularly?" I asked.

"No, I surely don't. I've never joined one. Bob's people are all Catholics but he doesn't go to church either. He has one sister who is a devout Catholic. But I just never did care about going to church myself. There are certain morals I live up to but I don't believe it's necessary to go to church to live right. We don't drink and do all those kind of things because we don't like 12 to. Bob has his own friends and I have mine. We have to have separate interests because Bob is away at work so much of the time.

"Bob is a very independent person. When he is bidding for a job he sticks to his original price, regardless of whether someone else bids lower or how badly he needs it. And he usually gets the job. He says he puts into a picture exactly what he is paid for it, no more, no less. For an artist, he has a lot of business sense and can drive a good bargain.

"A year ago last Christmas Bob and I took our first airplane trip. We went to Jacksonville so we could be with our families. That was one of the things we had always wanted to do most. It cost lots of money and we paid double for it all last summer when work was so scarce. But the trip was so pleasant, we were there almost before we knew it. It took just a little more than three hours to make the trip. Flying is one thing we both like and we are trying to save enough now to take a long plane trip. If I can't have a home and family, we might as well use our money to fly where we want to."

"Hazel, do you like to work out?" I ask.

"Yes, I do. I have been thinking lately about getting a job. Before I got married I worked in an office and I worked in a large hotel on the beach two years ago when Bob didn't have

## Library of Congress

any work and 13 we were broke. But Bob doesn't like for me to work. He says I can work when he gets to the point where he can't, so I just haven't tried very much to get a job. I would love to work at the ball park teaching some kind of sport, I like sports so well."

"Do you vote?" I ask.

"I don't know a thing about politics. I think one politician is as dirty as another, so I just don't care to vote for any of them. Bob doesn't vote either. We are both Democrats and we read the paper every day. President Roosevelt has been a good president, and has really done his best to help the country. But as far as voting is concerned, it doesn't interest me at all."

"How is the foot you sprained?" I ask.

"Oh, it's all right now," Hazel replies. "It seems like every time I turn around lately I get hurt playing ball. I was playing tennis the other day and a girl hit me right under my right eye with her racket." She shows me her eyes, which is still a little swollen and blue. "It's almost well now but it surely was sore for two or three days. It was swollen so badly I could hardly see, and I was even afraid to play tennis for a few day, it hurt so much. But that is about all I have to worry about as far as sickness to concerned. Bob is healthy as can be. He had a bad cold the first of the winter but I doctored that with Vicks and he got alright. We don't have to spend much for doctor bills. They 14 are the least of my worries."

"Well, Hazel, I must be going now," I say, as it is getting late.

"Hurry back to see me and we will go for another swim," says Hazel, as I walk to the door.